

The Library Today and in the Future

Glenn H Morgan, Honorary Librarian

The National Philatelic Society is celebrating 100 years of service to the philatelist this year. The National Philatelic Society *Library* (NPSL), however, does not celebrate *its* centenary until 2003. The first date that there is any reference to book or periodical holdings, or, indeed, mention of a librarian in the list of society officers is 1903. As a result this short article will focus on the library's current status, rather than being a potted history – that will hopefully be produced in four years time.

Philatelists in Britain are fortunate in having available at least three top-flight philatelic libraries. However, it is acknowledged that the most accessible of these is NPSL. If you wish to undertake deep research, or simply browse through the latest magazine or catalogue, every member of the public from any nation on earth can visit us without much formality and with minimal fuss.

NPSL holdings comprise roughly 1,750 linear feet of shelving and cover all stamp collecting disciplines. The library caters for collectors at every level of the hobby and for those with all types of philatelic interest, however obscure these may be.

There are an increasing number of multimedia titles, as electronic publishing takes hold, together with more traditional books, monographs, newspapers, catalogues, exhibition items and periodicals. These go back as far as the 1860s when the hobby, whilst still in its infancy, was first becoming organised and written about.

A project is nearing completion that has involved putting onto a database all NPSL holdings – no small task when you consider the extent of what we have. These records will then be released on our proposed Internet site for anyone to access from any on-line computer, enabling them to plan their visit to us in advance. For those collectors who have not yet ventured onto the net but have a multimedia computer, a CD-ROM version is also under consideration.

The generosity of individual collectors and organisations is always a source of amazement to us. The volume of donations in any year amounts to many feet of shelf space, representing hundreds of pounds worth of financial support.

We invite all readers to 'think NPSL' when considering disposal of any philatelic literature, whether it is a single book or a whole library. This is what the classic philatelic dealers Argyll Etkin Limited recently did. This year saw them donating their huge philatelic periodical and stamp exhibition catalogue libraries to us. This literature amounted to over one hundred feet of shelving and has increased and enhanced our holdings of these two important areas immeasurably.

Our largest continuous benefactors (aside from the membership paying their subscriptions each year, of course – something that we do not take for granted) are the trustees of the British Philatelic Trust. Aside from providing the roof over our heads at a peppercorn rent in a central London location close to two tube routes, they also offer so much more assistance, both financially in the form of book binding grants and administratively as well.

So, the future looks very rosy for NPSL, although there is one 'blot on the landscape' which centres around getting more people to take advantage of its facilities. The library contains a wealth of material not easily found elsewhere and it is a great source of disappointment that more collectors do not visit.

We have around 400 visitors each season – roughly two users for each day that we are open for business. We would like to see this figure dramatically increase in the coming years. Based on users' feedback, those who do use our services are clearly satisfied. The scope of our holdings improves daily and a publicity campaign needs to be instigated to put across our strengths.

The library team are all volunteers and work extremely hard to enhance the status of this research facility – why not show your thanks to them by becoming a user, however infrequently you can make it? We revel in a challenge, being serious collectors ourselves, so see if we can help you solve where that strange postmark you've been pondering over came from, or where that local stamp may have been used from. We are all too willing to share our knowledge with visitors and if you're a 'first timer', then ask the duty librarian for a quick tour to help you get your bearings.

Visiting details

NPSL is open most weekdays and many Saturdays throughout every month – in fact over 200 days per annum and all for the cost of one decent football match in the rain! 'Library Day Membership' is also available at £2 per visit for non-NPS members.

Those intending to use the library are strongly advised to ring the day before on **0171 336 0882** to ensure that a duty librarian will be available to open-up for you. This will avoid a wasted journey on the rare occasions when NPSL cannot be opened on its designated days.